

AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION

(1) Please amend paragraph [0053] as follows:

[0053] The seventh embodiment of a fastener 145, illustrated in a perspective view in FIG. 14A and in a top (plan) view in FIG. 14B, varies from the sixth embodiment in that the shape of each of the first portion 146 and the second portion 148 is a pyramidal frustum rather than a conical frustum. As such, fastener 145 includes sides 150, 151 that are substantially planar, rather than curved as in the fastener 135 described above relative to FIGS. 13A-13B. The pyramidal fastener 145 is more preferably employed where the opening of the picket or rail has at least some straight sides for which a straight-sided fastener 145 provides a better fit. As described above relative to FIGS. 13A-13B, the first and second portions of the fastener 145 are desirably provided with sets of ridges 147, 149 for frictionally engaging an interior surface of an opening provided in the rail and/or picket. In the illustrated embodiment, a profile view of the ridges 147, 149 has a substantially triangular shape. A stop 152 is also preferably provided such that the fastener 145 is not inserted too deeply into either the rail or the picket.

(2) Please amend paragraph [0057] as follows:

[0057] A stop 222A₁, 222A₂, 222B₁, 222B₂ may be provided on the exterior surface of the fasteners 200A, 200B in either or both the first portion 212A, 212B and second portion 214A, 214B, for use in stopping the fastener 200A, 200B from being inserted too deeply into one or the other of the picket and the rail to which it is being joined. As illustrated, the stop 222A₁, 222A₂, 222B₁, 222B₂ may simply be the ridges 211A, 211B, 213A, 213B of either or both the first and second portions 212A, 212B, 214A, 214B having the outermost diameters, i.e., the ridges 211A, 211B, 213A, 213B having the largest diameters when compared to others of the

ridges. As may be clearly seen from FIGURES 15, 15A and 15B, in some embodiments, these outermost ridges 222A₁, 222A₂, 222B₁, 222B₂ do not function strictly as a positive stop, but rather simply provide the maximum ridge diameter for either or both portions 212A, 212B, 214A, 214B of the fastener 200A, 200B to engage their respective items (e.g., a picket or a rail). As can be seen in FIGURES 15A and 15B, the first and second hemispheroidal portions are symmetrical in construction to one another about their plane of opposition (illustrated by the lines separating the first portions 212A, 212B from the second portions 214A, 214B). While the fasteners 200A, 200B are desirably fabricated in one piece and of uniform material throughout, the first and second portions 212A, 212B, 214A, 214B, or other components of fasteners 200A, 200B may be constructed of different materials or different pieces of the same or similar materials and then assembled to make the fastener.